Tells the Facts and Names the Names

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■ IN THIS ISSUE

AMERICA'S ANSWER TO LUCREZIA BORGIA

- CIA Man Who Dripped Poison, Dropped Acid, Drove Hundreds to Madness and Death, Makes Final Exit

FIGHT FOR MICRO RADIO ENTERS HOME STRETCH

- FCC Opens Door, But Will it be One Step Forward, or Two Steps Back?

HOLLYWOOD'S GREATEST FEAR

- Jack Valenti Wants to Fight South-East Asia Wars All Over Again

OUR LITTLE SECRET

- Menchu, Stoll and Mass Murder
- Exxon Valdez: Ten Years After
- Where Elia Kazan First Snitched

Theirs To Steal, Ours To Win

Battle for the Soundwaves

Among the fiercest free speech fights in our time has been the battle over micro-radio. It's pitted community groups-turned-broadcasters using equipment costing a few hundred dollars, against the Federal Communications Commission, the National Association of Broadcasters and the vast media conglomerates. Micro-broadcasters have had their homes raided by posses of cops armed to the teeth. They've seen their equipment confiscated and their rights trampled.

The battle is one that goes back to the very dawn of radio at the start of the century, when thousands upon thousands of stations sprang up across the United States. By the early 1930s this democratic network had been wiped out. After the second world war low-power radio was reborn. Then, under pressure from the nascent and ambitious NPR network in the late 1970s it was wiped out again. Now, after several years of active civil disobedience by micro-broadcasters on the air and in the courts, we are approaching a watershed.

The FCC has acknowledged the strength of the micro-radio movement and is now trying to neutralize the threat by a familiar strategy of divide-and-rule, undermine-and-destroy. William Kennard, FCC chairman, has announced that the Commission is contemplating the legalization of low-power FM, and was issuing proposed new rules on the matter. We are now in the so-called "comment" period, which is presently scheduled to expire on April 12.

Hence the exciting but fraught moment of political opportunity. Can the micro-radio movement mount an effective campaign to save a legalized low-watt radio network across the country from being yet another outcrop of the communications industry, chained to business-as-usual by commercial priorities or the dreary cover-your-ass-ism of NPR and the liberal foundations?

The good news is that the battle against the National Association of Broadcasters and the FCC over the past few years has steeled a generation of micro-broadcasters. Whether it's Kantako in Springfield, Illinois, or Ruggiero and his friends in New York, or Dunifer of Free Radio Berkeley or the Watsonville radio group on California's middle coast, who built up an enthusiastic audience among the farmworkers in the Pajaro Valley, these are people who have waged vibrant wars for free expression. They've heard the knock at the door by the cops sent out by the FCC. They've openly defied the state, like Kantako, who sticks unflinchingly to the bottom line that the airwaves belong to the people, and they've fought long battles in the courts. Notable in these court battles has been the National Lawyers Guild's Committee on Democratic Communications (CDC), founded by people such as Peter Franck, the San Francisco-based free speech attorney who was once president of Pacifica Radio and whom CounterPunch has been talking to about the FCC's new moves.

"We have come much further than we would have dared hope ten, or even five years ago," Franck tells us. "But it's up for grabs whether we are about to see the glorious addition of a new democratic grass roots community radio to the FM band, or whether we will look back on the decade of micro-radio civil disobedience—1989-1998—as a golden age."

In 1979 the FCC banned any broadcasting stations of less than 100 watts of power, which promptly put out of business small, cheap community-based broadcasting. Instigator of the ban was NPR, which saw its interest in forcing the coagulation of these

(**Soundwaves** *continued on page 6)*

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Our Little Secret

The Busker Right

Earlier this year the busker right went into a feeding frenzy over Robert Stoll's book Rigoberta Menchu and the Story of All Poor Guatemalans. The word busker alludes to the London peddlers of old, singing their wares. The busker right - David Horowitz et al - do their busking to coax grant money out of half-mad right-wing billionaires like Richard Mellon Scaife. The sure way to tease out cash is to portray American political culture as all but overwhelmed by leftists intent on wiping out civilization, represented at its very finest by people like Richard Mellon Scaife and protected by sturdy guardians like David Horowitz.

Stoll's attack on Menchu was succulent fodder for the busker right. She's always been a particular irritant, since she (a) is Mayan (b) wrote a best-seller, selling even more copies than P.J. O'Rourke (c) is pro guerrilla. So news that she might have shaded the truth, somewhat misrepresented her life, came as manna from heaven. True to form, Horowitz took the Menchu case as yet another parable of the all-round moral and political rottenness of the left.

Stoll himself didn't get much scrutiny, which is a pity. For years now it's been clear that he'd seen an upward career an anthropology best approached by carefully calibrating his political analysis to suit the temper of the times. Back in 1993 he published Between Two Armies in the Ixil Towns of Guatemala, suggesting, counter to left analyses, the guerillas might bear a good deal of responsiblity for the carnage of the 1980s.

This posture was perhaps best symbolized by Stoll's treatment of a famous episode in where guerillas took over the Spanish embassy in Guatemala City, which was then attacked and destroyed by the Guatemalan army, with heavy loss of life. At the time the Spanish government was so incensed by what it regarded as criminally rash behavior by the Guatemalan junta that it suspended diplomatic relations. Stoll suggests, with a bit of artful ass-covering, that the destruction of the embassy might in fact have been an act of revolutionary suicide, with the building blown up from inside by the guerrillas, including Menchu's father. Horowitz siezes on this theory with particular enthusiasm.

Horowitz et al do their busking to coax money out of half-mad right-wing billionaires.

Stoll, it seems, speaks no Ixil. At the height of the Guatemalan army's repression he interviewed his Ixil informants in a hotel in town, in Spanish. It's fairly obvious that under such conditions any prudent Ixil would scarcely start talking to a North American anthropologist in terms of frankness about his political sympathies and enthusiasms a decade earlier. And so far as the attack on the embassy is concerned, it turns out Stoll somewhat based his theory in part on chats with two arson investigators in California. For its part the Catholic Church in Guatemala conducted a thorough review of the affair and concluded flatly that given the condition of the bodies and the other factors it was impossible to give credence to the theory that molotov cocktails ignited by the guerillas had caused loss of life. This conclusion appeared in Guatemala: "Nunca Mas", published by the Archbishop's Office on Human Rights in 1998.

After two assiduous books designed to show that guerilla movements,and the supporters of such movements, are mired in romantic misconception Stoll's career is now nicely set. The right can now go on happily shouting about PC follies and the need to take Menchu's book off all college reading lists. The only inconvenience to the rejoicing was the publication at the end of February of the investigation of Guatemala's recent violent history by the UN-backed Historical Clarification Committee of Guatemala. This nine-volume report has concluded bluntly that the actual count of civilian dead across 36 years was 42,275 dead, of "disappeared", 6,159, and that the estimated total of dead was 200,000. The report reckons that Guatemala's military governments and armed forces were responsible for 93 per cent of the violence, with just 3 per cent attributed to the guerrillas. The report said some of the state's counter-insurgency operations could be characterized as genocide, and speaks of "an exterimination of defenseless Mayan communities". The report also points the finger at the United States as having been part-author of this nightmare, starting with the CIA coup against Guatemala's democratically elected president Jacob Arbenz in 1954.

It wouldn't be fair to say that there was no coverage of the Guatemalan Truth Commission's report at the start of March. The major papers here all carried stories. But it's also true to say that the stories—in the New York Times for example—about Stoll and Menchu were given much livelier editorial treatment. To give a sense of comparison it's as though, in 1945, there were scores of vigorous news stories and opinion columns about a Jew presenting a slightly conflated account of the death camps and his own experiences in them and then, two months later, a somewhat smaller number of humdrum stories noting that the Nazis had murdered six million Jews.

In fact some newspapers here, the New York Times for example (in a story by Kate Doyle on March 1) saw the Guatemalan commission's report as something in which the US "can take pride... The report documents the American role in providing financial aid and training to Guatemalan Army units that committed atrocities. But what makes the findings remarkable[(!)] is that they are based on once-secret files provided to the Guatemalan truth commission by the United States

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government itself. This cooperation should set a precedent as other nations, especially in Latin American, try to come to terms with their cold war history." So: (a) undermine another's country's government, (b) train up death squads and sponsor genocide there, (c) denounce all press reports suggesting this is going on, and cause the journalists filing such reports to be discredited and fired, (d) destroy all the files you can find (e) claim a "precedent" setting moral victory when the truth finally emerges.

As for Rigoberta, what really are her sins? She did conflate accounts of brutalism and death. But as the Guatemalan truth commission makes devastatingly clear, she dictated her memoir to Elizabeth Burgo-Debray at a moment when the Guatemalan army was trying to exterminate the Mayan people. The situation was exactly akin to a Polish Jew dictating a memoir, with some factual blendings, to a sympathetic American intellectual in 1943. Menchu wanted to alert the world to what was going on, and to enlist sympathy for her people. She succeeded. That's what infuriates the busker right.

HENRY AND THAT VASE

In our February 1-15 issue we published information we had received indicating that at the conclusion of his visit to Peking in 1971 Henry Kissinger had attempted to leave with an ancient Chinese vase packed in his baggage. More than one potter of our acquaintance has expressed doubt about the speed with which a duplicate, appropriately thrown, glazed and fired, could have been turned out by a Chinese potter for substitution in the baggage. Dr. Kissinger's lawyers have not been slow in expressing their indignation at what they describe as a fabrication. We felt the utmost confidence in our source. However, the information imparted to us by the potters makes us feel that it would be fair to Dr. Kissinger, who has never requisitioned lawyers in the past when described as a mass murderer and war criminal (or any other charges we've laid to his name) if we rescind the charge that he's a klepto, not averse to stuffing a Chinese imperial vase in his valise. CounterPunch withdraws the allegation.

EXXON'S ALASKA LEGACY

March 24 will bring us the tenth anniversary of the most notorious foul-up in the history of the oil business: the Exxon Valdez spill which took place in Prince William Sound, 25 miles south of Valdez, Alaska around midnight when the vast 948-foot long tanker ran into Bligh reef. Over the next few days 11.2 million gallons of Alaskan crude oil poured into the Sound.

The spill fouled more than 1,500 miles of shore line. It killed more than 250,000 beaver; 26 orca whales; 2,000 sea otters; 300 harbor seals; 250 bald eagles. It turned the Sound's mussel beds into toxic graveyards and decimated herring and pink salmon stocks. Ten years later, of the 30 different species, only one has recovered, the bald eagle.

Exxon has boasted of spending $1.5 billion cleaning up the spill, but 20 per cent — 2.5 million gallons — of crude oil remains in the Sound, either coating the mussel beds or in tarry deposits on the shore. Exxon's cleaning crews only mopped up 15 per cent of the spilled crude. The remainder either evaporated or broke down.

Elia Kazan did some of his snitching to HUAC in the Occidental restaurant.

America's largest oil company soon faced suits from the federal government and from native tribal and fishing communities. In 1994 a federal district court jury ordered Exxon to pay $5 billion in punitive damages to 30,000 natives, fisherman and businesses suffering economic hardship because of the spill. To date, Exxon hasn't turned over a penny in satisfaction of that judgment. In fact the company is earning $400 million a year in interest on the money reserved in case it's ultimately compelled to pay up. Lee Raymond, Exxon's CEO, has said that the jury award was an "excessive and unwarranted judgment". Exxon has instigated appeals and other legal maneuvers to squash it.

Meanwhile the fishing industry in the Sound remains moribund and long-term prospects for the salmon fisherman are bleak, since the pink salmon have developed what biologists call functional sterility and such fry as do get spawned are severely deformed. The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration reckons that the salmon and herring catch in the chief fishing port of Cordova has been roughly cut in half, an annual $90 million loss.

Reacting to the smouldering fury of the spill's victims, Senator Ted Stevens of Alaska put through a law forever barring a rehabbed Exxon Valdez from plying Alaskan waters. Unabashed, Exxon renamed the tanker the Sea River Mediterranean and tried to sail it back to Valdez. When the tanker was stopped, Exxon challenged the constitutionality of the 1990 Act. This bid failed and so the company filed a "takings" claim, demanding $125 million from the federal government, on the ground its tanker had been unfairly "demonized".

The tanker's skipper at the time of the spill, Joseph Hazelwood, waited many years for the courts to decree punishment. This coming summer he will begin 1,000 hours of community service in south-east Alaska, picking up trash along highways outside Anchorage. The court has ordered him to spend a month a year in Alaska for the next five years.

Despite much public opprobrium at the time and spontaneous consumer boycotts, Exxon is doing just fine. North slope oil production has soared. The consortium operating on the North Slope — Exxon, Arco and British Petroleum — are earning after-tax profits estimated by Fortune magazine at over $3 billion a year. Even after production begins to decline in a couple years, the state of Alaska predicts the three companies will be earning profits of more than $2 billion a year.

Did the spill produce federal regulation to guard against such contamination in the future? The answer is an emphatic No. The companies are even resisting having their tankers escorted by tug boats through the Sound.

The Clinton administration has been lissome in its posture towards Big Oil. By contrast, Washington senator Slade Gordon, a Republican, has told the administration that it should hold up the impending merger of Exxon and Mobil until the former pays the $5 billion fine.

THE SNITCHING POST

Elia Kazan, now in intensive rehab courtesy of the Motion Picture Academy, did some of his first snitching to HUAC investigators in the Occidental restaurant near Capitol Hill. This was where Christopher Hitchens and his wife Carol Blue had the lunch with Sidney Blumenthal that more recently figured in Hitchen's affidavit to House impeachment managers. Perhaps the Occidental should theme its decor and artwork: everyone from Thomas Kyd to Whittaker Chambers. ■

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US Official Poisoner Dies

Sidney Gottlieb, who for more than two decades managed the CIA's Technical Services Division, died on March 10. His obituaries in the New York Times and the Washington Post tended to focus on Gottlieb's testing of LSD on himself and other CIA officers, portraying him as a kind of Merry Prankster, the CIA's very own Ken Kesey.

In fact, with Gottlieb's death, America has lost its prime poisoner. For many years, most notably in the 1950s and 1960s, Gottlieb presided over the CIA's technical services division and supervised preparation of poisons, experiments in mind control and administration of LSD and other psychoactive drugs to unwitting subjects. Gottlieb's passing comes at a convenient time for the CIA, just as several new trials involving victims of its experiments were being brought. Those who had talked to Gottlieb in the past few years say that the chemist believed that the Agency was trying to make him the fall guy for the entire program.

Incredibly, neither the Times nor the Post obituaries mentioned Gottlieb's vile role in the death of Dr. Frank Olson, who worked for the US Army's biological weapons center at Fort Detrick. At a CIA sponsored retreat in rural Maryland on November 18, 1953, Gottlieb gave the unwitting Olson a glass of Cointreau liberally spiked with LSD. Olson developed psychotic symptoms soon thereafter and within a few days had plunged to his death from an upper floor room at the New York Statler-Hilton. Olson was sharing the room with Gottlieb's number two, a CIA man called Robert Lashbrook, who had taken the deranged man to see a CIA-sponsored medic called Harold Abramson who ran an allergy clinic at Mount Sinai, funded by Gottlieb to research LSD.

The night Olson made his terminally abrupt descent from the hotel window the New York police asked Lashbrook to turn out his pockets. On a piece of paper were initials GW and MH, identified later as George White and Morgan Hall, White's alias. White was retained by Gottlieb to run a CIA safehouse at 81 Bedford St in Greenwich Village, in cooperation with Harry Anslinger's Bureau of Narcotics and Dangerous Drugs, for which White had previously worked. Gottlieb's men fixed up the house with one-way mirrors listening devices and secret cameras. From the fall of 1953 to the spring of the following year White threw parties on Bedford St, dosing his guests with sodium pentothal, Nembutal and of course LSD. Later White moved the CIA operation to San Francisco, with the same sort of set-up. He hired prostitutes to dose the guests, in an exercise known as Operation Midnight Climax. The encounters were filmed. On the walls White put photos of women being tortured and whipped. Another senior CIA man, John Gittinger would interview the hookers about their drugs and sex habits. Gottlieb flew out to visit the safe house at 225 Chestnut Street several times a year.

The experiments failed. The electrodes were removed, the men were shot and their bodies burned.

Gottlieb was a man of darkness. He sponsored research by the infamous Dr Ewen Cameron, a world famous shrink who had a clinic in Montreal at McGill where he dosed unwitting subjects (who had entered voluntarily for psychiatric treatment) with huge jolts of electricity through their brains, plus drugs plus lobotomies. Many people had their lives thus destroyed in Cameron's research, financed by Gottlieb and also by the Rockefeller Foundation. Cameron invented a particularly ghastly process called "psychic driving" whereby drugged and shocked patients, whom Cameron believed he had wiped clean of their previous personalities, would have tapes played sixteen hours a day, dictating their new personalities.

From time to time the patients, given Thorazine, Nembutal and Seconal, would be hauled off, administered amphetamines as a wake-up call, then got jolted with ECT at voltages forty times greater than was considered safe at the time. Cameron died of a heart attack while mountain climbing in 1967. The CIA eventually settled with some of Cameron's victims.

Gottlieb also funded the experiments of Dr. Harris Isbell. Isbell ran the Center for Addiction Research in Lexington, Kentucky. Passing through Isbell's center was a captive group of human guinea pigs in the form of a steady stream of black heroin addicts. More than 800 different chemical compounds were shipped from Gottlieb to Lexington for testing on Isbell's patients. Perhaps the most infamous experiment came when Isbell gave LSD to seven black men for seventy-seven straight days. Isbell's research notes indicates that he gave the men "quadruple" the "normal" dosages. The doctor marveled at the men's apparent tolerance to these remarkable amounts of LSD. Isbell wrote in his notes that "this type of behavior is to be expected in patients of this type"--meaning black men.

Gottlieb's research was never a case of pure science. He was a practical man. From the beginning, Gottlieb saw himself as part of the operational wing of the CIA. Even the forays into LSD research, Gottlieb saw as testing for a potential chemical warfare weapon. He arranged a contract with Eli Lily to produce synthetic LSD "in tonnage quantities". The aim was to have enough acid to incapacitate large populations and armies.

By the early 1960s Gottlieb's techniques and potions were being fully deployed in the field. Well-known is Gottlieb's journey to the Congo, where his little black bag held an Agency-developed biotoxin scheduled for Patrice Lumumba's toothbrush. He also tried to kill Iraq's general Kassim with a handkerchief doctored with botulinum and there were the endless poisons directed at Fidel Castro, from the LSD the Agency wanted to spray in his radio booth to the poisonous fountain pen that was handed to Rolando Cubela on November 22, 1963.

Even less well remembered is one mission in Gottlieb-backed mind control that occurred as part of the CIA's Phoenix Program in Vietnam in July of 1968. A team of CIA psychologists set up shop at Bien Hoa Prison outside Saigon, where NLF suspects were being held after Phoenix Program round-ups. The psychologists performed a variety of experiments on the prisoners. In one, three prisoners were anaesthetized; their skulls were opened and electrodes implanted by CIA doctors into different parts of their brains. The prisoners were revived, placed in a room with knives and the electrodes in the brains activated by the psychiatrists, who were covertly observing them. The hope was that they could be prompted in this manner to attack each other. The experiments failed. The electrodes were removed, the patients were shot and their bodies burned. ■

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The "Mickey Mouse" Bill

Valenti: Fear and (Really) Loathing in Las Vegas

One couldn't help note the paranoia that accompanied Jack Valenti's euphoria during his recent speech to SHOWEST, the annual, all-frills cattle market where Hollywood's executive elite herd their top talent and forthcoming films to Las Vegas and flog them to the owners of the nation's biggest theater chains.

On the surface Hollywood's top lobbyist sang the joys of Hollywood's largest box-office year ever, giddy with the news that "the international marketplace was infatuated by the stories we told". Valenti declared that in a time of political turbulence the movie marketplace "is the one true star that guides us into the ill-lit future".

Valenti was careful not to mention what was probably occupying the thoughts of many of the delegates; namely the Justice Department's recently announced preliminary investigation into block booking between the studios and the theaters. He could have told them, however, that they had no real reason to worry. After all, Hollywood's lobbying machine is in good shape sweetening both executive and legislative branches of government with over a million dollars in recent campaign and soft-money donations.

With a little procedural help from Henry Hyde ($14,395 from Hollywood PACs), Valenti steered three pieces of legislation through a Monica-fixated Congress. Two were designed to strengthen international copyright laws and prevent piracy while the other—the "Mickey Mouse" bill—extended copyright on TV and movie properties such as Mickey, Donald and Goofy for another twenty years. The dividend from this legislation for Hollywood could run into billions.

But Valenti, like any leader who has read Gibbon and fears the cunning of history, is nervous. Wary that Rome was destroyed by a combination of internal decadence and external barbarians, Valenti regularly begs his member organizations (Disney, Warner, Sony, etc.) to show parsimony when it comes to movie budgeting. But his words of caution fall on the deaf ears of an industry noted for profligacy when it comes to star salaries and CEO compensation. Having failed to curb the inflated star-salary system, Mr. Valenti's gaze has turned outward to ensure, at the very least, that the barbarians stay at the gate.

It was an old beef when Valenti lashed out in his speech at foreign governments "infected by [the] delusion that [they] know best how to build a thriving cinema industry" (suggesting that the likes of the French and the Chinese force their populations at gunpoint to see films they don't want to see), but he didn't throw the vitriol he hurled in 1993 when he tried, and failed, to bully the French to abolish supports for their own film industry. It's clear that Valenti's sights are now focussed elsewhere, on Hollywood's imperial backwaters.

Pirated video compact discs (VCD) are fast becoming Asia's preferred medium of movie consumption. VCDs are as pure as the original (hence none of the reproduction problems found in bootlegged American video tapes) and easy to smuggle. The pirates— South East Asian crime gangs— have destroyed 'legitimate markets' and made it impossible for Hollywood to do business there.

With the rising price of movie tickets and video rentals, pirated VCDs may be reason to cheer.

Hollywood is outraged by the Malaysian government, which banned the distribution of the 'Zionist' Prince of Egypt from the movie theaters while tolerating the distribution of the movie on pirate VCD. Hollywood is peeved that after MPA operatives, working in cahoots with local law enforcement destroyed Hong Kong's pirate VCD industry, the pirates fled to Malaysia and are now exporting, unencumbered, the pirated VCDs back into the Hong Kong market.

In his speech Valenti claims that "the defeat of both earthbound and cyberspace thieves" is his highest priority next century. "We must not, we cannot, we will not fail" in the face of the "brutes" attempting to "ravage our tomorrows". MPA insiders repeat Valenti's zeal, even when it is suggested that Malaysia, mired in economic depression, has more urgent priorities than defending Hollywood's property rights.

But one cannot help notice older ghosts from Jack Valenti's previous life as White House flack, when President Lyndon Baines Johnson used a younger Valenti as his leg rest in the Oval Office, warning of the 'domino effect' of an invisible, highly mobile enemy traversing borders and leaving a pollutant communist ideology in its wake. Is Jack Valenti now replaying that war?.

Those inside the industry who claim that yellow peril's modern day inheritants are not out to out to beat the system but to make a fast buck, of course, miss the point. Where the French are more or less contained as a declining cinematic power and in a world system where Hollywood's dominant position is almost complete, South East Asia is a rebel outpost against Hollywood's global stride.

Like bandits of old, the pirates go into these markets offering quality product at a low price Hollywood cannot compete with yet which the local consumer can afford. At a time when US movie theaters are hiking up admission prices and Blockbuster video has virtual monopoly of video rental prices, the example of South East and the prospect of their imminent arrival over here should be a reason for cheer, not sobriety. ■

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low-watt stations into bigger broadcasting units which could be recruited to the NPR network. As Franck puts it, it's as though the Federal Newspaper Commission, citing "efficiency", decreed that to save paper and ink only newspapers of one million circulation or more would be allowed to publish.

The Telecommunications Act of 1996 had exactly the same consequences predicted by its adversaries: a brisk orgy of engulfing and devouring by the biggest and richest corporations. Franck tells us that "a few years ago 23 different companies owned the thirty commercial radio stations in the San Francisco Bay Area. Today they are owned by ten companies. Eleven of the top twenty stations are owned by two, in the form of Chancellor Media Corp. and CBS Radio [which is owned by Westinghouse]. These days 99.99 per cent of the population is legally barred from access to the 'public' airwaves."

In the past decade, resistance to this corporate theft threw up more than a thousand micro-powered stations, plus legal challenges in the courts that the FCC evidently fears could prompt a court ruling that might drastically alter the legal terrain, in favor of free expression. Hence the "one step forward" by Kennard's FCC towards the new rules.

Before we get to these proposed rules, it's important to understand the diverse nature and motivation of factions within the micro-radio movement. There are the warriors for free expression, and then there's a strong group which wants the FCC to authorize micro-broadcasting with commercial advertising and then auction off the spectrum space to the highest bidders.

If this group has its way, the FCC's one step forward will produce the unpleasantly familiar two steps back, with the micro-radio rebels facing fines or prison if they broadcast and the FCC able to say to any judge that it did respond to pressure to legalize micro-radio broadcasting.

Hence the strong critique by the Committee for Democratic Communication of the FCC's proposed new rules, Franck ticks off the major points: The FCC proposes 100-watt, commercially oriented stations, which will overcrowd an already crowded spectrum and furthermore these stations would be able to bump off the air any lower power—ten to 100 watt—station any time it wanted. The Commission is considering a lottery system to competing applicants for a license, which means someone wanting to play nothing but Buster Benton [OK, a CounterPunch editor fancies this great bluesman] or hip hop on equal footing with a non-profit community group. A points system would be better.

The FCC seems to want to bottle up non-commercial micro-broadcasters in the lower end of the FM band, which would mean four times as many commercial as non-commercial micro-broadcasters. Furthermore, the FCC would auction the commercial slots to the highest bidders. See the trend? A broadcaster, on this FCC proposal, could own five micro-stations in different communities. There would be no requirement for locally-oriented broadcasting.

Franck and the CDC in San Francisco, Greg Ruggiero in New York, Robert McChesney in Madison, Wisconsin (who has written indispensable histories of radio and democratic access in the US) and some others have pulled together the Micro-Radio Empowerment Coalition and are trying to build a national movement in this FCC comment period (currently scheduled to expire April 12) round some central axioms, including: insistence on non-commercial service; one station per license holder; local license holding and no absentees; local programming; licensees to be unincorporated, not-for-profit associations or straightforward non-profits; allocation of new spectrum space, with radio manufacturers compelled to take this into account in their products.

Two further big points in the Micro-Radio Empowerment Coalition's set of demands to the FCC rulemakers. Contrary to current FCC policy, there has to be an amnesty and return of property to micro-broadcasters who have suffered property seizures and fines over the past decade. There must be no penalization of the micro-radio pioneers who, in hundreds of communities, will be the very people best set to realize the democratic promise of low watt radio.

Licensing fees have to be affordable. If the FCC stipulates fees of more than $500 for the non-profit micro-broadcasters, access will immediately be restricted to those with the respectability and endurance to make grant applications to the foundations. Foundation sponsorship spells death to feisty, rebellious, democratic broadcasting. Take a look at the current state of the environmental movement.

Calling all CounterPunchers! We're at a fraught moment. If you want to make an intervention, lobby your reps, some of whom—like David Bonior—have put out good statements. Send comments to the FCC. Contact churches and labor unions in your area and see what's being done. For info about the Micro-Radio Empowerment Coalition go to www.nlgdcd.org or email to mec@tao.ca or phone it at 212-942-8899. ■

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